

## May 11, 2009 - Welfare of Troops, Military Families Gains Emphasis, Rep. Murtha Says

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By Craig Smith

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WASHINGTON &mdash; A reshaped military will spend more on the needs of families &mdash; from child care and spousal support to lodging and education &mdash; and will increase psychological health programs and long-term care for returning soldiers, says the head of a congressional subcommittee that would fund such initiatives.

"Today, they are becoming more realistic about how much an individual can stand. They are now considering the families because the deployments are so long. They are considering post-traumatic stress syndrome, suicides," Rep. John Murtha of Pennsylvania's 12th district, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, said in an interview with the Tribune-Review.

The effort to redesign the military comes as tensions escalate between the United States and Iran, Korea, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As the Taliban strengthens its stronghold in Pakistan, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has proposed deep cuts in traditional weapons systems and spending increases for troops and technology.

It will not be an easy sell on Capitol Hill, said Murtha, a Democrat from Johnstown, who enlisted in the Marines during the Korean War and fought in Vietnam.

"It's the most complicated situation in the 35 years that I've been here, and what we're doing this year will have a direct impact on the future of the military," he said.

Recent events in Pakistan  
— Taliban militants have pushed out from the Swat Valley to as close as 60 miles from the capital — are making even the most senior members of Murtha's committee anxious.

"A lot of people are very nervous about it. ... It's complicated by the world situation. It's complicated by the fact that we're in debt. We've spent \$879 billion on the war right now. That's the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Debt has gone from \$5 trillion to \$10 trillion," said Murtha, whose great-grandfather served in the Army during the Civil War.

Washington is concerned  
that the Swat Valley  
might be the first domino to fall to the Taliban in nuclear-armed Pakistan, further complicating the battle in Afghanistan, Murtha said.

"You can't divorce one from the other. If you go into Afghanistan, you're going to confront the problems we have in Pakistan," he said.

The military must invest in relationships here and abroad, said Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander, U.S. Central Command.

"Typically, achieving U.S. national goals and objectives ... involves more than just the traditional application of military power," Petraeus recently told the committee. "In many cases, a whole of government approach is required."

Gates is proposing changes that would realign the \$534 billion defense budget to better fit national security needs, said Todd Harrison, fellow for defense budget studies at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment.

"The changes he proposed are pretty good in terms of getting the military on better footing," Harrison said.

Gates wants to increase money for special operations, for instance, and the kind of warfare the military will face in the future, Harrison said.

"What we ... did in the past, we went in with full military power. We used air and artillery and we decimated the enemy. The days of shock and awe are over," said Murtha.

The proposed changes, the most significant since the Cold War in the 1960s, stem from lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Bruce W. Bennett, senior defense analyst at the Rand Corp.

"What we've learned ... is we can't be everywhere doing everything at the same time," he said.

Murtha's great-grandfather, Abraham Tidball Bell, enlisted in the Army in Washington County and served at the Capitol during the Civil War. His Union hat and a letter Bell wrote home are displayed in Murtha's

office.

His father, John P. Murtha, and his uncles, Regis Murtha and Danny Murtha, served in World War II. His brothers, Charles, Robert and James, were Marines.

Murtha has been at the center of a recent controversy over congressional earmarks, the practice by congressmen of steering money to pet projects in their districts. President Obama has vowed to end the practice.

Murtha has inserted into bills hundreds of millions of dollars for his district for sewer and water projects, historical landmarks, diabetes and cancer research, and diabetes clinics, among other things.

"I don't make any apologies at all for what I do. ... I'm good at it, I have to admit. ... I make damn sure that we take care of our district," he said.

It started with the collapse of the steel industry.

"Western Pennsylvania was decimated by the loss of steel jobs. We went to (President) Reagan, we worked out a deal, which you could call an earmark, which limited the amount of subsidized steel. We saved the steel industry for a short time," he said. "Then we expanded it. We said there's more to this than just trying to save the steel industry."

Critics complain about such pork barrel spending, but it is not illegal.

"We know better what's needed in the district than some bureaucrat up here in Washington," Murtha said.

Earmarks helped bring Sony to Westmoreland County after Volkswagen abandoned its carmaking plant near New Stanton in 1988, he said.